

Arab Baptist Theological Seminary

كلية اللاهوت المعمدانية العربية

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Christmas in the Arab World

Have you ever wondered how Christmas is celebrated in different Arab countries? It is amazing to see Christ followers in the region celebrating Christ's incarnation no matter what tongue they speak or tribe they come from, and no matter how different their traditions are. How did some ABTS students and graduates celebrate Christmas?



Sudan

El Sadig, Bachelor of Theology student:

"My country has beautiful Christmas traditions such as popular dances and songs that were once part of traditional tribal ceremonies in celebration of crops, harvest and marriage. With the rise of Christianity and the conversion of many families, they changed the lyrics of the songs to praise Christ instead of influential people and used the dances to glorify God instead of glorifying the harvest. In addition to the dances, some Sudanese churches organize big processions where God's word is preached, and praises are sung all day. The best thing about these processions is that everyone participates."



Susanna, Bachelor of Theology student:

"This year, due to the political situation, Sudanese churches called for prayer on December 25, but many could not make it due to road blockages. We could not hold any event at our church in Khartoum as our area was rife with conflict. Instead, my husband Yousif and I went to the Northern State of Sudan, to a town called Karima. There, we marched on the streets with the locals, knocked on people's doors and wished them a Merry Christmas. A day later, we had a celebration in the church



neighborhood and invited everyone living there. We prepared a big lunch and a gospel message. Many came to Christ on that day."



South Sudan

Awad, 2020 Bachelor of Theology graduate:

"Most churches in South Sudan remember Christ's birth on December 25. We decorate our homes and churches with flowers and new curtains, and on the outer walls, we paint pictures that remind us of Christmas. We also celebrate in song and dance. On Christmas Day, the singers show up with their new colorful outfits. Some churches bring cows and prepare a feast. Then, they invite churches from other denominations to take part in the celebrations."

"Our popular dances set the South Sudanese Christmas apart from other Christmases around the world. All the tribes of a

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certain state show up. For instance, in the Aweil State, there are two tribes, the Dinka tribe and the Jur (or Luwo) tribe. Recently, people from the Falata tribe have been showing up, too, although they are not Christian. As a local church, we distribute gifts to those in need such as grain, tea, and children’s clothing. We also show The Jesus Film for two days in a row.”



Morocco

A couple from Morocco, graduates of 2014:

“Christmas is not an official holiday in Morocco, but we make sure to celebrate it every year. Throughout December, we reflect on the meaning of Christmas at our home church, and we tell others about God’s initiative to reconcile us to Himself. During this season, we welcome new believers whom we had been visiting and discipling. This year, for instance, we were so delighted to welcome a widow and her twin daughters and another man from a neighboring city. They expressed how lonely and thirsty they had been for spiritual fellowship, but now that they found us, they were full of joy.”

“We also held a two-day retreat during the Christmas weekend. We enjoyed the devotions and games that the youth had prepared. We ate together and shared updates, and in the evenings, we got to listen to one another’s testimonies. We also distributed food packages and winter clothing to those in need, and we encouraged the youth to give during this season rather than expect to receive.”



Algeria

A couple from Algeria, graduates of 2012:

“When Algerian Christ followers celebrate Christmas, they use it as an opportunity to tell others about Christ’s birth. Usually, Algerian Christians focus on the resurrection more than they focus on Christmas, because while our surroundings may be accepting of the consumerist

aspect of the Christmas holiday, they have a hard time grasping the truth of the resurrection.”

“Because many church doors were still sealed this year, churches could not prepare events and gifts for children as usual, so families gathered in homes to celebrate. Ours celebrated in the mountains. We had good food, and together, we reflected on each of our gifts and the areas we intend to improve in 2022.”



Yemen

Yemeni Bachelor of Theology student who is living in Egypt:

“A young girl at church asked me how we will celebrate Christmas this year. This question brought back flashbacks of Christmas in Yemen. We would dress up as Santa Claus and distribute gifts on the streets. We would go to malls and children’s centers for cancer and autism. So, I told that young girl,

‘We are exiled from our homeland, not because of any crime we committed, but because we strove to plant seeds of joy and peace in a country worn by war. But don’t be sad. We will go out and have fun. We will have our Aseed (Yemeni breakfast similar to rice pudding), Salta (Yemeni soup) and Kabsa (Yemeni one-pot dish). We will wear our thobe and janbiya (a belt and a dagger as part of the Yemeni traditional attire) and proclaim our joy in the birth of the Lord Jesus our Savior, and we will shout: O, hear my people! On Christmas, I learned about Christ’s love for me, which made Him come to earth. He chose this path to show me that I have a way out of slavery and into freedom.’”



Lebanon

Karim, Bachelor of Theology student:

“This Christmas was very special for us as a family because a baby girl joined us, and we named her Vanessa. We enjoyed our time together despite the electricity and fuel shortage, which meant we didn’t have proper heating. Despite the murky situation of the country, the people of Lebanon value family gatherings this season.”

“We had Christmas events, both at the Zahle and Beirut branches of my church, Jesus Prince of Peace. We prepared

programs for the young adults, and in Beirut, the young adults made some visits and distributed food packages. We also distributed yule logs and oven baked chicken the night before Christmas.”



“If I were to comfort the Lebanese people this season, I would encourage them to look at the Bible, to see that Jesus’ circumstances weren’t any better than ours today. Jesus was rejected. He had no place to lay His head. His country was a Roman colony. His followers weren’t better off. This season, people need to hear God’s word.”



Syria

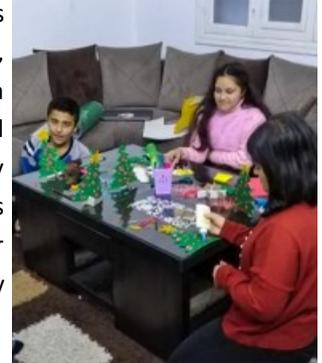
Despite everything going on in Syria, “Christmas is a joyful time in my country,” **Olfat, Certificate in Ministry student**

shared, “The people sing popular Christian songs called ‘jawfiya’, and we make Christmas desserts such as marsham (a type of cookie).” Where there are Christians in Syria, one finds decorated churches and streets, and the nativity scene recreated beneath the Christmas tree. Olfat is part of a charity helping Syrians who suffered staggering losses in the past few years. She shared, “This Christmas season, we distributed food packages to families which include oil, flour, coffee, candied



almonds and Christmas desserts. At church, we welcomed a ministry team who prepared a special program for children. We also invited the people of our community for a Christmas recital.”

2020 Bachelor of Theology graduates, Rafed and Hiba, are currently serving the Lord in Syria through home visits as well as a Bible study group and a children’s ministry at their home. They shared, “This Christmas, we held a celebration for the Sunday school children, and they were so happy with their gifts. The birth of Christ is a joy for the people. We express our joy by obeying God’s word and pray that His peace fills all people.”



Iraq

Ara from Iraq, a 2012 Master of Divinity graduate:

“Christmas is a great time to share the gospel in Iraq, so we plan two events for children during the month of December. The first is for children that we invite from different schools and camps for the internally displaced. The second is for the Sunday school children of our church. On December 3, for instance, we had an event for nearly 100 kids from different backgrounds.”



“On Christmas Day, right after the service, the church had a fun time of fellowship before we each went off to spend the evening with our families. On our dinner tables, we had an array of national dishes such as Dolma, Biryani, Ouzi, and for dessert, we had an Iraqi Christmas cookie called Kleicha (a date-filled cookie).”

“Christmas is a symbol of new beginnings, so I encourage others to seek a new beginning with the One who can touch their hearts and heal them. Many Iraqi families live in camps, in caravans and tents. Life there can become quite tough, especially during the cold month of December. So, our church tries to spark hope in the hearts of these children and remind them that God loves them so much, even when times are bad.”

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Pray with Us:

Prayer Requests from Students and Graduates around the Arab World

Susanna from Sudan | Bachelor of Theology student

Please pray for peace and stability in Sudan. The situation is very delicate. May the Lord put an end to the stench of death, hunger, and sickness. Hospitals are closed because there is no funding. Pray fervently for us.

El Sadig from Sudan | Bachelor of Theology student

My country is having to contend with many challenges lately, so I ask you to pray that the Lord delivers Sudan from oppression, injustice, and instability.

Ara from Iraq | 2012 Master of Divinity graduate

I ask you to pray that security and stability return to my beloved country, and for the Iraqi Church, that it always bears the light of Christ and tells of His love to everyone.

Student from Morocco | 2014 Diploma of Theology graduate

Please pray for those who are following up with new believers in our country because it is a risky task. Pray for the young people at church that they bear the torch of the gospel with all passion and zeal. Pray also for Morocco amid the rising tensions caused by the soaring prices and other economic pressures.

Rafed and Hiba from Syria | 2020 Bachelor of Theology graduates

Please pray that people all around Syria find peace and blessing in this new year. Our prayer is that all of Syria knows Jesus as King.

Olfat from Syria | Certificate in Ministry student

Pray that peace fills my homeland and that my people experience God's divine presence.

Karim from Lebanon | Bachelor of Theology student

Pray for protection over my two daughters Daniella and Vanessa. Pray for my wife, too, as the month after giving birth is difficult. Pray for me and for my ministry. We need more workers, who are on fire for God, to follow up with more families.

Prayer for the Church in Algeria

Several of our students and graduates shared with us that the Algerian Church is facing systematic persecution as church closures continue. Some are physically sealed; others are asked to cease all activity. So far, none of the churches have been allowed to reopen, and many Christians are feeling discouraged. We ask you to pray that Algerian Christ followers find encouragement in Christ during these very difficult times and that the Algerian Church's witness remains strong.